

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3323

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements to the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 7, 2021

Mr. CRAMER (for himself and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements to the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Justice Out-
5 reach Improvement Act of 2021”.

6 SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH 7 PROGRAM.

8 (a) OUTREACH REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of
9 Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach regarding the Vet-
0 erans Justice Outreach Program to justice-involved vet-

1 erans, military and veterans service organizations, and rel-
2 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice community, in-
3 cluding officials from local law enforcement, court, and jail
4 systems and others as determined appropriate by the Sec-
5 retary. Such outreach—

6 (1) shall be designed—

7 (A) to spread awareness and under-
8 standing of the Program;

9 (B) to spread awareness and under-
10 standing of veteran eligibility for the Program,
11 including the eligibility of veterans who were
12 discharged from service in the Armed Forces
13 under conditions other than honorable; and

14 (C) to improve the identification of justice-
15 involved veterans; and

16 (2) may be conducted in person, virtually, or
17 through other means, including by the dissemination
18 of informational materials and contact information.

19 (b) STRATEGIC PLAN.—The Secretary of Veterans
20 Affairs shall develop a strategic plan for the Veterans Jus-
21 tice Outreach Program. In developing such plan, the Sec-
22 retary shall conduct—

23 (1) an assessment of barriers to working with
24 justice-involved veterans in rural, remote, and under-

1 served areas, including potential steps to address
2 such barriers; and

3 (2) a workforce gap analysis for the Program.

4 (c) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF VJO SPECIALISTS.—

5 (1) INCREASE.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
6 fairs shall increase the number of Veterans Justice
7 Outreach specialists responsible for supporting jus-
8 tice-involved veterans in rural, remote, or under-
9 served areas, including areas located far from De-
10 partment of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as de-
11 termined by the Secretary, through—

12 (A) the hiring of additional Veterans Jus-
13 tice Outreach specialists;

14 (B) the reallocation of existing Veterans
15 Justice Outreach specialists; or

16 (C) such other means as may be deter-
17 mined appropriate by the Secretary.

18 (2) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall de-
19 termine the number of Veterans Justice Outreach
20 specialists required, and the locations of such spe-
21 cialists, under paragraph (1) by taking into ac-
22 count—

23 (A) such number and locations needed to
24 achieve the mission and strategic goals of the
25 Veterans Justice Outreach Program;

(B) any gaps in the workforce of the Program, including such gaps identified pursuant to subsection (b)(2); and

4 (C) strategies to address such gaps.

8 (d) PERFORMANCE GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION
9 PLANS.—

(C) providing support for research regarding justice-involved veterans.

(A) qualitative and quantitative milestones, measures, and metrics, and associated timelines

1 for completion of the plans under paragraph (1)
2 and barriers to such completion;

3 (B) an identification of relevant staff; and
4 (C) an estimate of resource needs and
5 sources.

6 (3) PERFORMANCE DATA.—The Secretary shall
7 establish a process to regularly collect and analyze
8 performance data to assess the efficiency and effec-
9 tiveness of implementing the plans under paragraph
10 (1).

11 (e) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary shall
12 ensure that all Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists re-
13 ceive training not less frequently than annually on—

14 (1) best practices for identifying and con-
15 ducting outreach to justice-involved veterans and rel-
16 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice commu-
17 nity; and

18 (2) veteran eligibility for the Veterans Justice
19 Outreach Program, including with respect to consist-
20 ently communicating changes regarding eligibility
21 (including through the use of a script or other ref-
22 erence materials).

23 (f) REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION.—

24 (1) FIRST REPORT.—Not later than one year
25 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-

1 retary shall submit to Congress a report on the fol-
2 lowing:

(A) An assessment of implementing subsection (c), including—

5 (i) strategies to increase Veterans
6 Justice Outreach specialists responsible for
7 supporting justice-involved veterans in
8 rural, remote, or underserved areas; and

(ii) the progress of the Secretary in addressing gaps in the workforce of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program identified pursuant to paragraph (2) of such subsection.

14 (B) The performance goals and implemen-
15 tation plans established under subsection
16 (d)(1).

24 (g) REPORT ON VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS.—
25 Not later than one year after the date of the enactment

1 of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Attorney General, shall submit to Congress a report on the engagement of the Department of Veterans Affairs with veterans treatment courts, including—

5 (1) the availability and efficacy of veterans
6 treatment courts in meeting the needs of justice-involved veterans;

8 (2) best practices for Department of Veterans
9 Affairs staff and justice-involved veterans in working
10 with veterans treatment courts; and

11 (3) the ability of justice-involved veterans to access
12 veterans treatment courts, including any barriers that exist to increasing such access.

14 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15 (1) JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERAN.—The term
16 “justice-involved veteran” means a veteran with active, ongoing, or recent contact with some component of a local criminal justice system.

19 (2) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM.—The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Program” means the program through which the Department of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-involved veterans and provides such veterans with access to Department services.

7 (4) VETERANS TREATMENT COURT.—The term
8 “veterans treatment court” means a State or local
9 court that is participating in the veterans treatment
10 court program (as defined in section 2991(i)(1) of
11 the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of
12 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1))).

